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Road map towards the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan for 2014-2017

Summary

This document is presented in response to Executive Board decision 2011/12 and outlines a road map, as a living document, for the formulation of the next UNICEF medium-term strategic plan (MTSP). The paper sets out a series of steps relating to the remainder of the current plan period and to the development of the next strategic plan for 2014-2017, which will be presented to the Executive Board for approval at the second regular session of 2013. The paper also indicates how this work is linked with the evolution of the integrated budget.

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I. Background

1. The MTSP provides a guiding framework for the work of UNICEF, including its country programmes of cooperation, global advocacy and operations. The current MTSP[1] was developed in consultation with the Executive Board in the context of the Millennium Declaration and associated Millennium Development Goals, and was approved by the Executive Board in September 2005. Originally covering the period 2006-2009, the MTSP was twice extended by the Executive Board, through its decisions 2008/14 and 2009/5, and now covers the period until the end of 2013.

2. Two in-depth reviews have been undertaken of the extended MTSP, and these were reported to the Executive Board in 2008, in document E/ICEF/2008/18 (the midterm review), and in 2010, in document E/ICEF/2010/9 (the in-depth review). These exercises enabled the organization and the Executive Board to identify emerging lessons in implementation and external trends, as a basis for making strategic and specific adjustments to key elements of the plan.

3. The MTSP contains the following key components:

(a) Context and guiding principles;

(b) Focus areas, including strategies, key results and targets;

(c) Supporting and cross-cutting strategies;

(d) Management and operations;

(e) Resource implications and the financial medium-term plan;

(f) Results matrix (detailing the key result areas, organizational targets and associated indicators);

(g) Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (including global monitoring, evaluation and research and key performance indicators for the MTSP).

4. Each of these components has been updated during the plan period, particularly through the use of the findings of the 2008 midterm review and the 2010 in-depth review. Documentation on the updates of the results matrix and the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, including the key performance indicators, has been provided to the Executive Board (see documents E/ICEF/2008/19 and E/ICEF/2010/10). The financial medium-term plan estimates are updated annually.

5. Reporting on the MTSP has been provided primarily through the successive annual reports of the Executive Director, supplemented by a detailed Data Companion, containing data and analysing trends on the MTSP indicators, and other, related documentation.

[1] "The UNICEF medium-term strategic plan, 2006-2009 — Investing in children: the UNICEF contribution to poverty reduction and the Millennium Summit agenda" (E/ICEF/2005/11) 11 July 2005.

II. Context for the development of the next medium-term strategic plan, 2014-2017

6. The next MTSP will be formulated, in particular, in response to the emerging findings and final outcomes of the process of the 2012-2013 quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. These will be reflected and integrated into the next plan at all stages of its development.

7. The plan will take account of and reflect the outcomes of major intergovernmental conferences and deliberations, including the Fourth Intergovernmental Conference on Delivering as One, in Montevideo (2011); the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, in Busan, Republic of Korea (2011); and the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development (2012). UNICEF will focus particularly on its strategic positioning so that, on the basis of its mandate and mission for the rights and well-being of children, the organization may contribute to the emerging agenda of priorities for the "post-2015" framework for development.

8. The plan will also incorporate commitments under related and relevant international agreements and programmes of action, including the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Almaty Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries, and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

9. The plan will be based on analysis of the situation of children across regions and country conditions, including major disparities and the factors underlying them. Its aims will be the following: address the major challenges and risks faced by the most vulnerable children, adolescents, women and families in the coming period, including the risks posed by environmental and economic trends; and take advantage of major opportunities and new modalities, including South-South and triangular cooperation, and both existing and emerging sources for sustained social investments to benefit children and to protect and promote their rights.

10. The new MTSP will strongly reflect the strategic re-focus of UNICEF on equitable outcomes and the most disadvantaged children, families and groups. The equity re-focus has been adopted as a strategy to achieve accelerated and sustained results for children in relation to development goals, based on and consistent with the MTSP foundation strategies of the human rights-based approach to cooperation and gender equality. Strategic result areas within the present MTSP results matrix have been identified for intensified monitoring, on a pilot basis beginning in 2012, as a means of working with national partners to promote accelerated results for disadvantaged children and families.

11. The formulation of the new plan will be informed by lessons learned from reviews and by the findings of recent evaluations, including those of organizational performance, the foundation strategies of the MTSP, cross-cutting themes and humanitarian response. It will address critical and emerging issues, including the contributions and leadership roles of UNICEF in United Nations system-wide coherence, the future roles of UNICEF in cooperation and advocacy in middle-income countries, in fragile and transition situations and in support of national capacity development for the rights of children.

12. The plan will further reflect the centrality of strengthening the results focus and efficient and effective management of the operations of UNICEF, including the enhancement of results-based management and reporting. This involves the use of intensified field monitoring approaches and a clear and comprehensive narrative of organizational contributions to equitable results on behalf of children's rights; improved articulation and disaggregation of results, indicators and baselines for monitoring and strategic management; and enhanced organizational performance and risk assessment and analysis.

III. MTSP consultation process

13. The consultation process for the new MTSP will draw on the experience from 2005 in formulating the present MTSP. As before, the process will incorporate a series of interactive discussions and consultations. These have already begun and will continue through the period prior to submission of the new plan at the second regular session of 2013. The discussions and consultations will continue to take place through informal sessions with Executive Board members, dialogue with United Nations sister agencies (including especially close coordination with the strategic planning activities of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and others), and interaction with development and humanitarian experts, major non-governmental organization partners and National Committees for UNICEF.

14. Views on the strategic and priority roles of UNICEF in different contexts, including humanitarian situations, low-income countries and LDCs, middle-income countries and the industrialized world, and in relation to major emerging trends facing children and women, will be sought through these consultations and through structured questionnaires sent to key stakeholders, including all Member States.

15. UNICEF will also draw on the experience and perspectives of its regional and country offices in the final review of the present plan and the development of the next one. Consultations will be held through established mechanisms such as the regional and global management teams, beginning in the first half of 2012, while the contributions of UNICEF staff at all levels will be facilitated through online portals and surveys, as well as other opportunities.

IV. MTSP formulation process

16. The process of formulating the next MTSP will begin with the end-of-cycle review of the current MTSP for 2006-2013, including the key lessons learned. This will enable UNICEF to draw on lessons learned from implementation of the current plan, the thematic discussions held with the Executive Board on each of the five focus areas, and the most current strategic directions emerging for the work of the organization. A combined end-of-cycle review report and proposed outline of the next MTSP will be presented to the Executive Board for discussion at the first regular session of 2013. The proposed outline will include a description of the key issues to be addressed for children in 2014-2017, the programmatic focus (including an outline of the proposed focus areas and key results) and a summary of the major strategies and operational management issues for the coming plan period.

17. The complete draft of the new MTSP, including the draft results framework and Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, will be presented to the Executive Board for discussion at the annual session of 2013. Based on this discussion, the final version will be submitted for approval at the second regular session of 2013.

18. In order to prepare for the final review of the current MTSP, the current results matrices and the Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, including the key performance indicators, will be updated for the period 2012-2013 and made available to Executive Board members in early 2012. Adjustments to the results framework in particular will reflect the organization's intensified focus on equitable outcomes and the pilot efforts to enhance the monitoring of bottlenecks and barriers facing disadvantaged children and groups in a subset of strategic result areas.

V. Linkage of plan and budget preparation

19. At the second regular session of 2012, a report jointly prepared by UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA will be presented on steps taken and progress made in preparing an integrated budget for 2014-2015. The report will include a mock-up of the integrated budget and a review of the impact of harmonized cost classifications on existing cost recovery policies. Based on the feedback from the members of the Executive Board in the discussion on the mock-up of the integrated budget and tables, the relevant budget tables of the MTSP for 2014-2017 will be prepared. Further, informal discussions will be held in the first half of 2013 to align the resource framework with the results to be proposed in both the strategic plan and the integrated budget that will be presented to the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2013 for review and approval.

Annex

Timetable towards the medium-term strategic plan for 2014-2017

Date	*Issue/Topic*[1]
First regular session 2011	Thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the medium-term strategic plan (MTSP) focus area 2: Basic education and gender equality
Annual session 2011	Annual report of the Executive Director on progress and achievements against the medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2013 (E/ICEF/2011/9) and Data Companion
	Thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the MTSP focus area 4: Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse (E/ICEF/2011/CRP.15)
Second regular session 2011	Institutional budget for 2012-2013(E/ICEF/2011/AB/L.2)
	Thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the MTSP focus area 1: Young child survival and development (E/ICEF/2011/CRP.24)
November 2011-January 2012	*Informal consultation* on the UNICEF annual report to the Economic and Social Council (E/ICEF/2012/3)
	Informal consultation on the thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the MTSP focus area 3: HIV/AIDS and children
First regular session 2012	Road map towards the medium-term strategic plan for 2014-2017 (E/ICEF/2012/5)
	Updated results matrices and updated Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to the medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2013 (to be posted on the UNICEF Executive Board website)
	Thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the MTSP focus area 3: HIV/AIDS and children
February 2012-May 2012	*Informal consultation* on the annual report of the Executive Director on progress and achievements against the medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2013
	Informal consultation on the thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the MTSP focus

Date	*Issue/Topic*[1]
	area 5: Policy advocacy and partnerships for children's rights
Annual session 2012	Annual report of the Executive Director on progress and achievements against the medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2013 and Data Companion
	Thematic discussion on results and lessons learned in the MTSP focus area 5: Policy advocacy and partnerships for children's rights
Second regular session 2012	Report, jointly prepared and presented by UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA, on steps taken and progress made in preparing an integrated budget for 2014-2015. Report to include a mock-up of the integrated budget and the impact of harmonized cost classifications on existing cost recovery policies
June 2012-December 2012	UNICEF engagement in the process for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) and related issues
October 2012-April 2013	Informal consultations: • End-of-cycle review of the MTSP for 2006-2013 • Outline, structure and strategic focus of the MTSP for 2014-2017 • Further refining of the strategic focus of the MTSP for 2014-2017, taking into consideration the emerging recommendations of the QCPR; findings of the end-of-cycle review of the MTSP for 2006-2013; the Fourth Intergovernmental Conference on Delivering as One, in Montevideo, 2011; the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, in Busan, Republic of Korea; the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development, 2012; and the post-2015 Millennium Development Goals agenda, etc.

Date	*Issue/Topic*[1]
	• Alignment of the MTSP and the integrated budget regarding the resource plan, results frameworks, and linking of resources to results
First regular session 2013	Combined end-of-cycle review of the MTSP for 2006-2013 and outline of the MTSP for 2014-2017 for review, discussion and comments by the members of the Executive Board
	Annual report to the Economic and Social Council
Annual session 2013	Annual report of the Executive Director on progress and achievements against the medium-term strategic plan for 2006-2013
	Draft MTSP for 2014-2017:UNICEF to present the draft, including implications of the QCPR, for review, feedback and discussion by Executive Board members. Based on the formal discussion and any follow-up actions requested by the Executive Board, UNICEF will finalize the strategic plan for submission to the Executive Board at its second regular session of 2013
May-August 2013	*Informal consultations* on the integrated budget for 2014-2015, in support of delivery of the strategic plan
Second regular session 2013	Medium-term strategic plan for 2014-2017 and the results matrices for the plan: UNICEF to present the plan to the Executive Board for approval, with implementation to commence on 1 January 2014
	Integrated budget for 2014-2015, to commence on 1 January 2014: UNICEF to present to the Executive Board for approval the integrated budget that underpins the new MTSP

[1] Presentations to the Executive Board of the items listed for the first, annual and regular sessions of 2011 were preceded by informal consultations.

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Harnessing knowledge to achieve results for children

Summary

Knowledge, data and research form the foundation of UNICEF programming and are critical to the organization's efforts to accelerate equitable progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Understanding the challenges that the most disadvantaged children face is key to achieving results. These challenges are in a constant state of flux, shaped and complicated by changing demographic, social, economic and political factors. The revolutionary changes in information and communications technology (ICT), however, provide new opportunities for generating, sharing and managing knowledge.

This report, in response to Executive Board decision 2011/3, which requested UNICEF to submit for information a strategic integrated framework for research and knowledge management, sets out an integrated approach for harnessing the organization's repository of knowledge into tangible results for children. It outlines three main strategies: (a) building the evidence base around the most effective interventions affecting the lives of children; (b) supporting UNICEF country offices and their partners as both the starting points and most important end-users of knowledge on children; and (c) forging more effective linkages across technical areas of UNICEF work at country, regional and headquarters levels. Each of these strategies draws on the considerable potential of ICT to provide new platforms for exchange of information and facilitate the flow of knowledge.

Achieving these strategic goals involves many different parts of the organization. Steps are set out to achieve an efficient division of labour and stronger coordination across the organization, as well as to establish a mechanism for prioritizing the knowledge needs of UNICEF.

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The recent consolidation of the Office of Research with the Innocenti Research Centre into a unified research group signals the commitment of UNICEF to building its knowledge capacities by re-energizing its research function. This paper explains the new role of the Office of Research as a catalyst of change and describes how it will work with other parts of the organization. It also describes steps towards the development of an operational plan that will translate these ideas into action.

Contents

		Page
1.	UNICEF in a changing world	3
2.	Towards an integrated framework	4
3.	Strategic priorities	5
	3.1 Building the evidence base for results	6
	3.2 Putting countries at the centre	7
	3.3 Strengthening linkages between knowledge functions, themes and levels of the organization	9
4.	Structures, modalities and processes	10
	4.1 Clarifying the functions of the Office of Research	10
	4.2 Structures and mechanisms to set priorities for knowledge	12
	4.3 Changing incentive structures	13
	4.4 Information technology	13
	4.5 Ensuring adequate resourcing in a resource-tight world	14
5.	Conclusions and next steps	14

1. UNICEF in a changing world

1. The world is experiencing a period of unprecedented and increasingly unpredictable change. While progress for children continues, the gains are spread unevenly. In some settings, resources and capacities for socio-economic development are increasing, offering new possibilities for action for children. Elsewhere, persistent barriers impede efforts to improve children's lives. Often, these barriers are exacerbated by challenges in governance or prolonged conflict. Patterns of poverty are shifting and exacerbating socio-economic disparities in low, middle and high-income countries alike. Development solutions that worked in the past are inadequate against the backdrop of demographic, economic and political transitions. Widening inequities necessitate innovative, cost-effective strategies for reaching the poorest and most disadvantaged children.

2. UNICEF has responded to these challenges by renewing its commitment to equity and adopting strategies that seek to reach the most disadvantaged children with effective interventions. To fulfil this commitment and remain effective, it is critical for UNICEF to identify the children being left behind and to research (and disseminate) 'what works'. Doing so is even more important because the global economic crisis demands greater efficiencies in spending available resources. UNICEF recognizes that basing decisions and action on evidence and sharing results across countries and sectors is one of the most important ways to ensure that every dollar is spent effectively for the benefit of all children.

3. Research and analysis are also needed because of the increasingly complex issues that UNICEF must address: (a) increasing children's access not just to schools but to *quality* schooling; (b) scaling up early childhood development interventions for socially marginalized children; (c) identifying and promoting effective interventions in child protection in complex social or political environments; (d) challenging discrimination based on ethnicity or HIV status; and (e) monitoring children's rights in conflict zones. These are areas where governments are increasingly turning to UNICEF for technical advice and guidance, and for lessons learnt from other countries that are addressing similar challenges.

4. At the same time, new information and communication technologies offer an opportunity to transform the ways in which knowledge is gathered and shared, enabling the swift dissemination of information through numerous borderless networks and portals. A virtual community is emerging that expands the types of knowledge and data that can be brought to bear on a given problem, and enables collaboration across multiple stakeholders to deliver solutions. These developments offer huge opportunities for expanding the reach of the UNICEF research and knowledge-sharing function to strengthen organizational effectiveness.

5. In response to these opportunities and needs, UNICEF is taking decisive steps towards ensuring that it is positioned to generate, manage and share knowledge in the new and creative ways, making use of recent advances in communication technology to generate results for children.

6. This paper sets out a framework through which UNICEF can better harness knowledge to achieve results for children. It focuses on the role of research and knowledge management in UNICEF work.[1] It highlights opportunities to be seized and challenges to be faced, and describes a set of steps that are underway or planned to make progress. A key assumption is that, while there is potential for UNICEF to attain its aspirations, its position as the authoritative source of knowledge for children cannot be taken for granted.

2. Towards an integrated framework

7. The comparative advantage of UNICEF in harnessing knowledge for children is clear. It has:

(a) *Unique access to local and global knowledge*. The presence of UNICEF in diverse contexts is a major asset. Through long-standing collaboration with statistical offices and line ministries on multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) and other data collection initiatives, UNICEF can help bring together comparable data sets within and across countries, identify trends, and act as a clearing-house for knowledge on children. Through partnerships with other United Nations organizations and academic centres of excellence, UNICEF also has access to data on key trends and developments for children globally.

(b) *Ability to gather evidence and apply knowledge*. Through its network of country and regional offices, UNICEF can capture new ideas, test, replicate or scale up interventions based on the latest evidence, and help countries and partners interpret and apply relevant knowledge.

(c) *Convening and brokering ability*. UNICEF is able to draw attention to knowledge gaps and bring together formal and informal networks around the world to identify solutions at international, regional, national and local levels.

(d) *Ability to focus on the whole child*. The mandate of UNICEF enables it to work across programmes and sectors. It has long championed the use of interdisciplinary approaches to address interrelated or cross-cutting issues affecting children.

(e) *High credibility and legitimacy*. UNICEF is regularly consulted on the latest knowledge and operational research on children. It is seen as a reliable source of objective knowledge and guided by the 'best interests of the child'.

8. These assets must be consolidated to strengthen the position of UNICEF as a knowledge leader on children's issues. Much more can be done to promote 'integrated' approaches that link research, evaluation and knowledge management across the organization. This would help ensure that a systematic body of knowledge is available to all country, regional and headquarters offices, and that the knowledge is effectively used to guide policies and programming. The process of knowledge generation, synthesis, dissemination and use needs to be recognized as a continuous and dynamic cycle across UNICEF, as illustrated in the framework below.

[1] Knowledge is central to many aspects of UNICEF work. This paper, focusing on research and knowledge management, does not cover important knowledge-related functions, such as routine programme monitoring, the provision of technical support, innovation in supply, or evaluation.

Chart 1: Knowledge generation and management

9. New knowledge (based on evaluation and research) has to be an integral part of a larger process of knowledge management (defined as the processes of brokering and convening of ideas and people, assessing and synthesizing evidence, as well as sharing and disseminating findings), in order for knowledge to be utilized to achieve 'results'. Weaknesses in any point in that cycle can undermine efforts to strengthen investments in knowledge. For UNICEF to maximize its comparative advantages, the flow of knowledge needs to be seamless across all levels of the organization, with knowledge moving in both directions — to and from the field, but ultimately applied and used at the country level.

3. Strategic priorities

10. The overall goal is to harness available knowledge to accelerate and improve results for children over the coming 2-3 years, focusing on achieving the Millennium Development Goals with equity. This paper focuses on three strategic priorities that will help accomplish this across all levels of the organization. The three strategic priorities build on existing strengths of UNICEF but also address key shortcomings in the way knowledge is currently gathered, managed and used by the organization. These priorities are:

(a) Building the evidence base for results for children;

(b) Putting countries at the centre of knowledge gathering and use;

(c) Strengthening linkages between knowledge functions, topics and levels of the organization.

11. These goals and the processes for achieving them are explained below.

3.1 Building the evidence base for results

12. In each programme area, UNICEF and partners gather evidence to inform programmatic action. Intervention and evaluation research, routine programme monitoring data, as well as household surveys such as the MICS, guide the design of programmes. Efforts are made to establish the cost effectiveness of the equity strategy in the health sector, as exemplified in the recent 'Narrowing the Gaps' paper. Such cost-effectiveness modelling exercises now need to be extended to the fields of education and child protection to bolster the argument for focusing on the most disadvantaged children in different settings and contexts.

13. There is a need to build on the organization's sector-specific research by gathering evidence on what it will take to strengthen delivery *systems*. In each area of its work, from immunization to education, to nutrition and water and sanitation, UNICEF research must focus on how best to bolster existing systems for service delivery and outreach so that effective interventions can be scaled up and sustained. Applying a systems perspective to UNICEF research on implementation will strengthen the organization's understanding of "what works" across different contexts.

14. Moving forward, there is growing recognition that if UNICEF is to deal with both the old and new challenges facing children and achieve global targets, it must address the root causes of the inequities that children experience. A first but essential first step is to understand better how these inequities operate and why they impede results for children. Examples include the social norms that uphold violence against children, the institutional and structural factors that foster discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, the laws and policies that at times maintain inequitable structures instead of dismantling them, and the social factors that undermine resilience. UNICEF is determined to find evidence-based ways to address these bottlenecks.

The importance of longitudinal data

Longitudinal data on children offer insights into trajectories and transitions of individual children that are essential for evaluating and understanding impact of policy measures. Closer collaboration with such initiatives and thinking out the future of such long-term investments will be a key part of UNICEFs future knowledge base.

15. Across all areas of UNICEF engagement, programmatic and analytical frameworks need to be more firmly centred on the life course of children. Each of the different periods of a child's life — early childhood, middle childhood and late childhood/adolescence — will be scanned for evidence of 'what works' and evidence gaps that need to be filled — at global, regional and country levels. Such a life-course framework is essential because of the increasingly strong evidence that shows, for example, how profound disadvantages in the early childhood years or a loss of opportunity and protection in the adolescent years can become deeply entrenched and difficult to reverse. Research on adolescents that adopts such a life-course perspective will, for example, be framed in a manner that views young people as the parents of a future generation of young children, focusing on how best to equip them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to carry out that task and contribute to their communities and societies in an empowered way.

16. Ensuring that UNICEF action is indeed evidence based calls for institutional mechanisms and processes to promote knowledge gathering and sharing as well as to strengthen the linkages between programme, advocacy, evaluation and research functions at the global, regional and country level. Examples of these institutional mechanisms and processes, and a suggested organizational structure to support them, are described in section 4.

Harnessing new technologies to strengthen research on children

There is growing experience in the use of web communication tools, linking up different parts and levels of the organization, and distilling the 'how' of lessons learned. There are now over 20 'communities of practice' in action across the organization. These have changed the landscape of knowledge acquisition and sharing, breaking traditionally vertical hierarchies and opening opportunities for much more horizontal and rapid exchange of ideas and problem solving experiences. Some have moved beyond UNICEF boundaries; others have been inward looking, with objectives that are more limited. Bringing these communities of practice as an integral part of the UNICEF knowledge architecture offers a unique potential to tap the organization's depth of 'tacit' knowledge on what works for children.

3.2 Putting countries at the centre

17. UNICEF work in over 150 countries provides the crucial interface between the generation of knowledge on children and programmatic and policy actions to put that knowledge into practice.

18. At the national level, the country programming process remains the centrepiece of the UNICEF knowledge base. Each cycle of programme development includes a situational analysis of major issues affecting children, and identifies gaps and opportunities in key parameters affecting their lives. There is now a renewed emphasis on carrying out situation analyses with partners, experimenting with different models of analysis, and identifying capacity gaps in the fulfilment of children's rights. This scanning of the evidence and bringing together of the most recently available data, along with the commissioning of studies to fill gaps, contributes to a better understanding of the inequities that exist — which children are being left out or left behind — and why. It serves as a resource both for national and civil society partners and contributes to global knowledge about children's circumstances.

19. The situational analysis is complemented by MICS that are undertaken in a sub-set of countries by UNICEF every 3-5 years. The data from these household surveys contribute significantly to country and global knowledge of the realities of children's lives, and are used by UNICEF and others both within and outside the United Nations system to understand trends of change, monitor progress toward the Millennium Development Goals and assess the impact of policies and programmes.

20. Despite this important knowledge from situational analyses and the MICS surveys, many country offices have expressed a need for more research evidence and support in strengthening their capacity for data collection, analysis and use in policy fora, and dissemination to partners.

21. Currently, there are limited formal opportunities for staff to share knowledge and experience across technical sectors and across countries. As a result, country office teams often feel unable to benefit from the latest ideas or experiences from other parts of the world. While recent developments in communications

technologies open new possibilities of search and acquisition of knowledge at the country level, country teams are often faced with an information overload and do not have the time to filter or assess the quality or reliability of that information.

22. Recent efforts, such as the development of ICON on the UNICEF intranet, as an easily accessible source of information on new developments and work carried out by Division of Policy and Practice to distil 'lessons learned' from the field, has sought to fill this gap. However, this information is often global and does not as systematically capture information and data from UNICEF country offices.

23. At the same time, making full use of such knowledge requires debate, interaction and dialogue. There is an increasing need for fora and 'safe' spaces where ideas can be exchanged and constructively critiqued by UNICEF staff and partners. Creating and sustaining these arenas becomes as important as the flow of knowledge itself. To fill this gap and meet the need for improved generation and sharing of knowledge at the country level, the following measures are being taken to support country offices to systematically harness the knowledge that they need:

(a) *A new common monitoring framework* has been introduced that requires not just the assessment of inputs and outputs, but also a six-monthly assessment of progress made in reducing the bottlenecks or overcoming the barriers to achieving results for the most disadvantaged children, so that course-corrections in programming can be made, if necessary.

(b) In key countries, *implementation research will be carried out*, with support from expert in-country or regional research organizations, on a select group of topics, to support national strategies addressing critical determinants of child well-being. A feedback loop drawing on these studies will inform policy dialogue at the national level and, ultimately, at the global level.

(c) *Partnership initiatives around priority areas of applied research work* will be spearheaded, bringing together the best academic centres globally with national research and policy centres. Areas of work that require multi-country involvement and longer time frames will be themes for cross-divisional partnership between Programme Division, Policy and Practice, Office of Research, Evaluation Office, and Governance, United Nations and Multilateral Affairs. This could include, for example, a better understanding of the structural and social determinants of child well-being and 'what works' to influence these; children's experiences of new patterns of urbanization; or the long-term impacts on children of prolonged conflict or climate change.

(d) *Research at country level will be strengthened*, especially in helping identify those children 'left behind'; research is not only an input into programme design but becomes an output in its own right, influencing policy debate locally and contributing to global knowledge. The Office of Research will provide innovative tools of analysis that can allow country offices and governments to understand better the nature and distribution of disadvantage among children and how different forms of inequity intersect.

(e) *Trends in the situation of children will be captured in a strengthened observatory function*. Each UNICEF field office possesses, in addition to the data collected through MICS and other data consolidated in DevInfo, extensive data on the situation of children. This includes both quantitative and qualitative data, information on legal and policy frameworks, assessments of social norms and

attitudes relating to children, women and marginalized groups, including minorities. Country teams will be supported by Division of Policy and Practice and the Office of Research to systematize the data that is available to country offices. Information will be consolidated into an information bank of knowledge or 'observatory'. This will also help to identify gaps in information and new areas for data or knowledge acquisition.

24. Overall, the goal is to help country offices to both generate knowledge and focus attention on the use of evidence for action and to provide them the necessary support to do so.

3.3 Strengthening linkages between knowledge functions, themes and levels of the organization

25. How effectively knowledge is acquired and used depends on the way UNICEF organizes its work. During the current medium-term strategic plan, UNICEF has strengthened its knowledge capacities in almost all programme fields and at all levels. The growth in knowledge base has taken place both within sectors, with new approaches and perspectives increasingly being provided in social policy, and the cross-cutting fields of gender and human rights. The equity focus is fostering greater coherence in the approaches that individual programme groups are promoting.

26. Nevertheless, knowledge tends to stay within the unit (headquarters division, regional office, or country office) in which it is gathered and used. While significant programming ideas and experience do move between divisions and regions, they do so in an ad hoc way.

27. If UNICEF is to maximize its advantage in being engaged in many of the most critical areas of children's lives then there is an urgent need for breaking down silos, and creating greater synergies between functional and programmatic areas.

28. The three priority areas to strengthen linkages across the organization are described below:

(a) *Establishing a common strategic agenda for knowledge and research* for the organization. The formulation, implementation and monitoring of a strategic knowledge and research agenda (described in section 3.1), for UNICEF to take forward with key partners, will provide a common framework to help unify priorities and create greater coherence in knowledge generation across the organization. It will also help to reduce the competing demands for the limited resources that are available for research and knowledge management.

(b) *Strengthening ties between research and evaluation.* UNICEF has launched important initiatives to leverage greater learning from its evaluations, and significantly raised the quality of such investments. The link between evaluation and research, with evaluation feeding into and shaping a research agenda, makes a natural complementarity that will be strengthened. Joint evaluation and research efforts will support the growing number of impact evaluations.

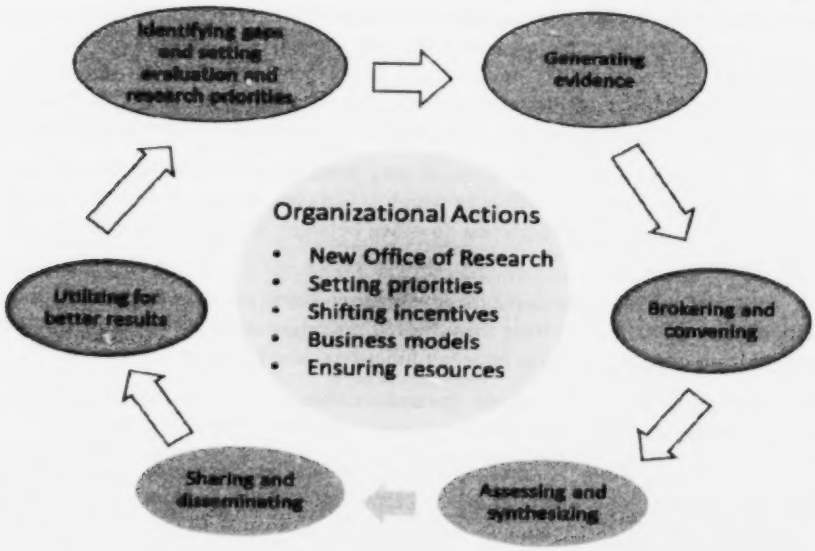
(c) *Strengthening linkages between programme and policy, as well as research and advocacy.* UNICEF advocacy needs to be strongly anchored in evidence for it to remain credible and persuasive; stronger links will be established between programme, policy, research and advocacy on a regular basis.

29. New communication technologies, such as video conferencing and webinars, have great potential to strengthen dialogue across the organization, using videoconferencing. This can facilitate the flow of knowledge across the organization and simultaneously reduce cost of travel.

4. Structures, modalities and processes

30. Utilizing knowledge for results requires an organizational structure and formal systems and processes so that the right knowledge is available to the right person at the right time. Considerable gains in effectiveness can be expected with relatively modest investments in simple changes in organizational direction and structure.

Chart 2: Knowledge generation and management



31. Five key organizational steps are proposed, as shown in the centre of the figure above:

(a) Clarifying the functions of the Office of Research;

(b) Putting in place processes for setting priorities;

(c) Changing incentives;

(d) Working with information technology;

(e) Ensuring adequate resources.

4.1 Clarifying the functions of the Office of Research

32. By consolidating the Office of Research and the Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) in one location, UNICEF has created a unified research group with a mandate of strategic leadership and coordination of UNICEF efforts in research and

knowledge sharing and dissemination. This organizational shift was implemented to highlight the corporate priority to use knowledge and research in support of 'results' for the most disadvantaged children. It was also implemented to increase efficiencies and coordinate knowledge generation and use across UNICEF. The Office is led by a Director and two Associate Directors; together they will oversee and guide the work within the IRC and more broadly across UNICEF.

33. The IRC, given a limited staff complement, will not be able conduct research on all topics. It will encourage programme technical teams at the headquarters and regional office level to undertake research and consolidate knowledge within their own areas of work, while the IRC researchers will prioritize research on the root causes of inequity (as described in Section 3.1) as well as cross-regional studies on economic and social policy, in child protection and child rights. This will allow a special contribution towards building the evidence base in child protection and breaking new ground in developing tools of analysis in economic and social policy, as well as child rights. IRC will continue to serve as a convener of new research on children, including on 'sensitive' or neglected issues where its reputation as the organization's independent research centre on children will be an asset.

34. In overseeing, coordinating and linking research undertaken in different parts of UNICEF, the Office of Research will take a 'light touch' approach, acting as a convenor and standard-setter, building capacity and disseminating information rather than playing the role of an oversight mechanism for all research and knowledge generated by UNICEF. In addition to research, knowledge management capacities will be explicitly strengthened, with a small dedicated team linking with other parts of headquarters and the field.

35. Situated as a headquarters function in Florence, Italy, the Office of Research will act as a core part of the global knowledge group, using its special geographic location as a meeting place to bring academia and programme specialists together. To harness the knowledge that is generated internally, the Office of Research will identify a focal point in each programme section at headquarters and at regional offices to track new evidence and proactively engage in regular sharing of new knowledge through email networks, conference calls, and periodic forums for discussing and interpreting evidence. The Office will encourage the formation of virtual 'communities of practice', bringing together headquarters and country staff, to provide a forum for knowledge sharing, innovative thinking and brainstorming on new topics or methodologies for research.

36. The senior management team of the Office of Research, together with the researchers at the IRC, will work to undertake the following types of functions:

(a) *Continue to position IRC as a 'laboratory of ideas' that undertakes high-quality strategic research on children.* It will focus its work around: (i) developing, testing and using methodologies to exploit available data, evidence and information; (ii) identifying evidence and information 'gaps' and starting processes to fill them; and (iii) staying responsive to country and regional offices by providing support, guidance, technical backstopping to research activities. To maintain high-quality work, the Centre will retain its own capacity for primary and secondary research, while calling upon others, both within UNICEF and externally, to conduct relevant research and analysis.

(b) *Establish procedures to maintain quality assurance standards in the conducting and interpreting of research*. The Office of Research will review and comment on methodology and design of large research endeavours undertaken in any part of UNICEF and will put in place peer-review mechanisms and ethical guidelines to improve the quality of research being undertaken. In addition, the Office of Research will identify and disseminate tools and guidelines to build research capacity.

(c) *Commission analytical work and convene technical seminars and retreats to help shape the future* of UNICEF work beyond 2015, bringing together leading thinkers on critical issues for children and building new academic partnerships, particularly with organizations in the South.

(d) *Ensure a bridge between new developments in policy and research in industrialized countries and those in low and middle-income countries*, while continuing the necessary research to support the advocacy in support of National Committees.

(e) *Establish an electronic knowledge data base or 'one-stop shop' for consolidated evidence relevant to children*, bringing together quantitative and qualitative information derived from both primary and secondary research.

(f) *Host young and distinguished researchers and policy specialists* as part of a newly created fellowship programme and explore similar fellowships for UNICEF field staff.

4.2. Structures and mechanisms to set priorities for knowledge

37. There are many potential topics for research on children's well-being and survival across programmes and countries. To be effective, UNICEF cannot meaningfully engage across all areas and must prioritize according to its core competencies and comparative advantages. This has to be across the organization as well as within programme areas. A description of potential areas of research is described in section 3.1. Currently, processes to prioritize between those and other topics remain undeveloped.

38. The following structures and mechanisms are suggested to help UNICEF target its limited resources on critical knowledge gaps and operationalize the three strategic priorities listed in section 3.

(a) The Global Management Team and Regional Management Team meetings will be used as decision-making fora for the direction of research. This will allow an overall direction to be set and revisited over time but also ensure that UNICEF research remains responsive to the diverse challenges facing children across different parts of the world.

(b) A 'cross-divisional' ideas group. Research is currently carried out in different parts of the organization. A small cross-divisional group, bringing together senior managers and research-oriented staff from headquarters and the field, will be established to support discussions on ways to shape the future of research in UNICEF and serve as a resource and sounding board for the Office of Research to plan and implement research initiatives.

(c) A small high-level research advisory panel, consisting of external experts will supplement the internal ideas group to provide guidance on critical directions

for research on children, making suggestions for future areas of attention and new frontiers that UNICEF and its partners could take forward.

(d) Research focal points within each programme section at headquarters and at regional offices will be identified to track and report on new evidence, proactively engage in regular sharing of new knowledge through email networks and conference calls, and organize periodic forums for discussing and interpreting evidence.

(e) Web-based media and portals will be exploited to bring new research findings and debate directly to the field, in forms that are easily accessible and 'alive'. This effort will be in support of the Office of Research's own research but also provide a platform for dissemination of research from other parts of the organization and partners.

4.3 Changing incentive structures

39. A short-term push on knowledge and research can lead to quick gains. For the longer haul of bringing knowledge into the centre of UNICEF working processes, incentives need to be reconfigured. Both the 2006 Organizational Review and the 2009 Research Review underlined that progress towards UNICEF becoming a 'learning organization' will only come about if there is a reorientation of structures and incentives for staff to engage in knowledge work.

40. The difference between success and failure lies in bringing a shift in the way that knowledge and research is valued and prioritized by programme staff themselves and, equally importantly, by managers.

41. Staff members need to be able — and be supported — to identify and understand knowledge flows better, recognize that knowledge assets can be found or cultivated inside and outside UNICEF, and leverage these to bring change for children. Steps will be taken to:

(a) *Support capacity-building initiatives*. For knowledge and research to find their place in an action-oriented organization such as UNICEF, research has to be demystified. Training modules will be developed that allow senior managers to see the potential of research, better understand its uses and pitfalls, and ways to strengthen the strategic use of knowledge by UNICEF.

(b) *Explore new ways to recognize and reward investments in learning and knowledge*, such as altering performance assessment systems and recruitment processes to prioritize skills in knowledge and research as a core competency in selection of programme and management staff.

(c) *Develop further the UNICEF publication policy*. Each country office appears to have a different interpretation of what is permitted or encouraged by way of publications by staff. The UNICEF publication policy will be clarified, encouraging staff to publish innovative or critical research in peer-reviewed journals.

4.4 Information technology

42. As UNICEF collaborates more with external stakeholders, tools will be needed to support sharing, networking and collaboration.

43. UNICEF has significant Information Technology (IT) capacity at headquarters as well as in many regional and country offices. Standards for IT infrastructure, systems and web applications exist and the UNICEF global telecommunications infrastructure is improving. Internet and intranet platforms, however, are currently separate, with no easy way to link the two (e.g. to publish on both simultaneously without duplication of effort).

44. To that end, the following are examples of the types of activities that may be undertaken with the goal of rolling out a *functional and flexible document management system* that links internal and external knowledge more easily.

(a) UNICEF internal and external web environments will be integrated as far as possible and complemented with a document management system that permits greater interaction and consistency between the two platforms. This will include databases that allow information to be gathered from both within and externally.

(b) Extension of analytical tools that allow for better modelling, simulations and visualization that will be particularly valuable for research.

(c) Exploration of social media to reach out to new audiences. Social media also allows UNICEF to listen to what groups, such as difficult-to-reach marginalized young people or children living with disabilities, are concerned with.

45. While the Information and Communications Technology environment continues to innovate, these alternatives will support rather than lead knowledge management strategies.

4.5 Ensuring adequate resourcing in a resource-tight world

46. The allocation of regular resources for the Office of Research during the current biennium has allowed the UNICEF research function to benefit from the more predictable source of core funding (in addition to what is received in direct other resources contributions). To further raise resources for the Office of Research the following three ideas will be considered:

(a) *Setting an indicative target* of expenditure for research — ideally from regular resources funding.

(b) *Establishing an Innovation Fund* to help create incentives for new ideas and thinking in programming and research.

(c) *An annual meeting with donors and national committees* to share the most interesting (or counter-intuitive) insights derived from research on children.

5. Conclusions and next steps

47. With the Millennium Development Goals deadlines approaching, UNICEF is taking steps to ensure that research is relevant to the delivery of interventions and actions for children, and that evidence is made available to support existing programmes. UNICEF will also marshal new knowledge to inform its programme choices in the increasingly differentiated settings in which children live across the world and shape priorities for children beyond 2015. By injecting resources in key areas and acting strategically, UNICEF will be able to strengthen its drive to achieve results for children.

48. Key results that are sought include:

(a) An equity agenda that is built upon the best available knowledge;

(b) Policy and practice at all levels that are systematically informed by evidence;

(c) Country office teams who are supported systematically with the latest knowledge on children, generated both internally and externally to UNICEF;

(d) Research, as a function, is integrated and mainstreamed across the organization;

(e) Knowledge management, evaluation and research are interlinked and undertaken in a much more dynamic and integrated way.

49. The present paper offers many ways by which UNICEF can achieve these goals. The next step is to test the feasibility of the ideas proposed and garner support for them from stakeholders both internal to UNICEF and externally. Only then can the ideas be translated into a workplan, timeline and budget.

50. The consolidation of the Office of Research and the Innocenti Research Centre, together with the refocus on equity offer a window of opportunity to strengthen the overall approach of UNICEF to knowledge management and research. Ultimately, how well UNICEF responds to this opportunity, will determine its effectiveness in reaching and addressing the problems of the most disadvantaged children. The rationale for getting it right is strong.